News

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ANSI Delivers Testimony Before Congressional Subcommittee on the Value of the Voluntary Consensus Standards Process

Official Testimony--House Subcommittee Hearing

Washington DC, November 5, 2001: ANSI and members of its constituency presented strong testimony before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce concerning the value of the voluntary consensus standards process with regard to enhancing health and safety regulations emanating from the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) *[Editor' note: The full text of testimony presented at the hearing is available via the hyperlink in the sidebar at left.]*

Led by Subcommittee Chairman Representative Charlie Norwood (R-GA), the hearing on "The Role of Consensus Standards-setting Organizations with OSHA" provided an opportunity for the assembled committee members—Reps. Major Owens (D-NY), Rick Keller (R-FL), Johnny Isaakson (R-GA), Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) and Hilda Solis (D-CA)—and panelists to discuss improvements to OSHA processes regarding the development of new standards as well as mechanisms to ensure that previously issued documents are regularly reviewed and updated. Chairman Norwood convened the hearing and set the tone for the day's proceedings: "Improving the health and safety in the workplace is why we are here today."

The Subcommittee heard testimony from a cross section of groups that share an interest in the process by which safety standards are developed. In addition to ANSI, four other organizations were invited to present their statements including two ANSI membership organizations and ANSI-accredited standards bodies: the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Also on the panel were representatives from the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH), a scientific research group, and Bakery Chef, Inc., a Kentucky-based producer of commercial baked goods, on behalf of the American Baker's Association.

In his statement before House Subcommittee members, ANSI's director of public policy and government affairs, David Karmol, presented an overview of the Institute's role in advocating adherence to principles of openness, balance, consensus (public review) and due process in the voluntary consensus standards process. He pointed out the positive and productive relationship that the Institute shares with OSHA and the dialogue that exists between the two groups.

Karmol indicated that ANSI had received an invitation from OSHA assistant secretary, John Henshaw, to coordinate efforts to help the regulatory body use the voluntary consensus standards process to update the documents referenced in its rulings. He noted, "OSHA cannot update these regulations without going through a full public process that the agency does not have the resources to accomplish" and added that "ANSI is ready to work with [the Subcommittee] to find a solution." Chairman Norwood said he would follow up on the ANSI offer and indicated that there would be another hearing wherein OSHA would be asked to testify. He mentioned that the hearing record would be kept open if other organization's wished to submit written testimony.

After the panelists completed their formal presentations, Subcommittee members solicited recommendations from the panelists regarding the best approach to promulgating health and safety standards. AIHA president, Hank Lick, supported the view that industry cooperation is a vital component toward improving health and safety in the workplace and identified the ANSI process as the "way to go" to achieve this goal. Both the NFPA and AIHA representatives asserted that their organizations

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use the ANSI process and emphasized the value that adherence to ANSI principles confers to standards development activities.

"The hearing was highly successful," said Karmol, "in terms of getting our message across to another important Congressional committee. Our message, that voluntary consensus standards are a valuable process for the government to use to assist in rulemaking and procurement, was definitely heard by the Subcommittee."

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